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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 016439

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STATE DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

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SUBJECT: NO RELIEF FOR CUBAN POLITICAL PRISONERS, OR THEIR  
FAMILIES

REF: HAVANA 15749

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Classified By: COM Michael Parmly for Reason 1.4(d).

11. (C) Summary: Cuba's political prisoners continue to suffer from appalling and unhealthy prison conditions, while many of their family members face vindictive and even terrifying acts organized by the Cuban Government. On August 16 and 17, USINT spoke on the phone with the spouses or parents of ten of the 75 peaceful activists jailed in the March 2003 crackdown. Most were convicted of violating Law 88: Protection of National Independence and the Economy of Cuba. Nine are still in prison and one is out on conditional parole. The relatives paint a distressing picture, not only of the prisoners' treatment behind bars but of their own struggle to get by as family members of "mercenaries" and "counter-revolutionaries." Some of these relatives are subjected to "acts of repudiation." Of the 10 families we contacted in Bayamo, Camaguey, Ciego de Avila, Havana, Las Tunas, Manicaragua, Manzanillo, Santa Clara and Santiago, six reported harassment of family members. All of the prisoners are dealing with health problems, some severe. End Summary.

HEALTH WOES  
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12. (C) The list of ailments of the ten prisoners is disconcertingly long: dengue fever, kidney failure, intestinal disorder, bleeding colon, malnutrition, ulcer, inflamed prostate, pulmonary distress, hemorrhoids, hypertension, knee issues, renal problems, osteoporosis, kidney cyst, emphysema, chronic gastritis, anemia, glaucoma, digestive problems. On average, the incarcerated members of the families we spoke with each had two or three serious medical conditions, and in many cases prison staffs are failing to provide treatment or medicine. In some cases, this failure is deliberate. Adolfo Fernandez Sainz, an independent journalist and opposition party member serving 15 years at Canaleta prison in Ciego de Avila, requires regular access to sunshine for a medical condition. But according to his wife Julia Nunez, a guard routinely denies Fernandez this right, without explanation. None of the common criminals is denied their time outside, she says. At the notorious Boniato prison in Santiago, Luis Milan Fernandez, a doctor who is serving a 13-year sentence, is recovering from dengue fever contracted on or about August 9, along with several other prisoners. (Note: At least 20 Cubans have died from the latest dengue outbreak. End Note.)

ARSON THREAT  
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13. (C) Since December 8, political prisoner Jose Garcia Paneque of the outlawed Democratic Solidarity party has lived at the infirmary of Bayamo's Los Mangos prison. Paneque, serving a 24-year sentence, is battling an intestinal disorder and other health problems, but his relatives may be having a tougher time. As reported reftel, his wife Yamile Llanes was home with 11 youngsters between the ages of 7 and 25 on August 3 when around 100 people staged a particularly intense "act of repudiation" in front of their house in Las Tunas. Llanes told us that a number of the children started crying when a member of the mob shouted, "Let's set the house on fire and burn the worms!" Others yelled, "We'll defend the Revolution with all means necessary!" Paneque's seven-year-old daughter remains traumatized and asks to move away from the neighborhood, her mother says. In Manzanillo, an act of repudiation was held August 13 against Lady in White Cruz Delia Mora, wife of Julio Antonio Valdez Guevara. Valdez, an independent librarian, is out on conditional parole and was at a hospital during the act, receiving dialysis. Thirty to 40 participants, none of them neighbors, gathered to snarl "worm!" and "counter-revolutionary!" at Mora.

#### HOUNDED OUT OF WORKPLACE

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14. (C) For Rebecca Rodriguez, the wife of dissident dentist Alfredo Pulido Lopez, a 2003 act of repudiation marked the beginning of the end of her work as a physical therapist. Around 100 workers at her clinic staged the event to denounce Pulido and, by extension, Rodriguez. Despite the harassment, Rodriguez held on for two more years, continuing to work until she could no longer stand the abuse meted out to "the wife of a mercenary." She quit, and swears she'll never go back "even if I have to starve." Thanks to support from a foreign NGO and her father, she is not in danger of starving.

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But Rodriguez, a Lady in White, is feeling the heat from State Security - and the cold shoulder from neighbors. "State Security knows everything I do," including a May 2005 visit to USINT. Neighbors keep her at arm's length, she added. "I am practically alone here." Pulido, for his part, is serving 14 years at Kilo 7 prison in Camaguey. An independent journalist, Varela Project organizer and member of Oswaldo Paya's Christian Liberation Movement, Pulido has respiratory problems and avoids the prison yard out of fear of being attacked by violent inmates.

#### HOLDING HIS TONGUE

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15. (C) Political prisoner Nelson Moline Espino isn't having trouble with other inmates, but he's choosing his words to the guards carefully these days. His father told us that in May, Moline, 41, complained to guards vociferously over the beating of a thin, elderly inmate, and consequently spent the next three weeks in a punishment cell, "without any communication." Moline, serving 20 years at Kilo 5 prison in Pinar del Rio, launched a hunger strike, but it didn't help him leave the punishment cell any sooner. Says his father: "At other prisons, he was allowed to make a weekly phone call home, but not at Kilo 5." The father says the family has not faced any harassment, but that his son is "in bad shape," and living "in bad conditions."

#### MANICARAGUA: DISSIDENT HELL

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16. (C) Moraima Leon, wife of political prisoner Arturo Perez de Alejo, has the rotten luck to live in the Villa Clara city of Manicaragua, infamous for denying dissidents access to cafeterias, bars, bus stations and sports facilities. "I don't get out much," she says, her world reduced to occasional trips to church or one of the few shops that will

serve her. She avoids possible run-ins with critics, usually senior citizens with comments like, "Your worm husband got what he deserved." A Lady in White, she is one of only two women on the city's 21-dissident blacklist. She tries to leave the city a few times each year, to meet up with other Ladies in Havana, but usually is blocked by Communist militants. Her husband, doing 20 years at Guamajar prison in Santa Clara, isn't faring any better. His 12 cellmates are all common criminals. The water is undrinkable. Often there is no water for flushing. Perez, of the Escambray Independent Human Rights Organization, suffers from an ulcer, pulmonary issues, an inflamed prostate and hemorrhoids.

LAYING LOW  
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17. (C) Osleivy Garcia, the wife of political prisoner Pablo Pacheco Avila in Ciego de Avila, is a rarity: a doctor who is married to a dissident but has been allowed to keep her job. She states, in a tone lacking conviction, that she is not being harassed, and makes clear she's trying to avoid the wrath of Communist militants. She concedes that Pacheco, whom she visited August 15 at Moron prison, is in bad shape. "He's sick," with hypertension, renal problems and a bad knee. "His spirits are down." Pacheco, an independent journalist, bunks with ten common criminals. Fellow inmates were taking his belongings, "but he's worked that out." Now he's just trying to avoid upsetting the guards, she says.

COMMENT  
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18. (C) Relatives of Cuban political prisoners can be forgiven for occasionally exaggerating the medical woes of their loved ones. For most inmates serving time for political crimes, the only early ticket out is conditional parole on health grounds. For this reason, family members might refer to a bad cough as a "respiratory ailment" and a paper cut as a "gash." That said, Castro's prisons - let alone the more frightening "detention centers" such as Villa Marista and 100 y Aldabo -- are enough to make a healthy man sick in a matter of weeks. The food is largely inedible, hygiene is inadequate and medical services sorely lacking. Since the official, temporary handover of power to Raul Castro, the armed forces chief and thus the country's top jailer, we have seen no change in the horrendous and inhumane treatment of political prisoners, and no let-up in the collective victimization of their family members.  
PARMLY